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ABSTRACT

Since Iraq gained independence in the 1930s and particularly since it became a republic in the 1950s and began earning oil revenue, efforts to improve Iraqi education have received increasing attention. By 1984 the educational system had achieved the ability to enroll every child reaching the age of six, and a national campaign to reduce illiteracy among those aged 15 to 45 was under way. Iraq now has an educational system in place offering preprimary, primary, intermediate, secondary, and higher education. The system is segregated by sex at the intermediate and secondary levels, but this segregation is slowly breaking down. Secondary education is split into general and technical/vocational tracks. Higher education is available at six universities (as well as other institutions) for students receiving good grades in the general secondary program. Enrollment at all levels increased substantially from 1968 to 1984; the annual rate of increase ranged from 14 percent at the primary level to 36 percent in secondary vocational schools. Despite these increases, Iraqi education still faces severe underenrollment (considering Iraq's manpower needs) in technical programs, higher education, and teacher training, and must significantly increase instructional and administrative staffing at all levels. (PGD)

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ECONOMIC PROSPERITY AND UTILIZATION OF HUMAN RESOURCES IN IRAQI EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

There has been a strong appreciation that education can be used to raise the productivity of the Iraqi labor force and to equip the country with indigenous skilled labor. While recognizing the need for a highly skilled manpower and the benefits that this can bring in terms of raising the standard of living in the community, the development of the educational system in line with the requirements of industry and the economy hindered, to some degree, by the rural traditionalism. Even so, considerable progress has been made at all levels of education.

There have been two fundamental developments, particularly in the last two decades, in Iraqi education: (1) the widening of educational opportunities to include every child reaching the age of six, and (2) the launching of the National Campaign Against Illiteracy-For Ages 14-45, of 1980. There have also been other widening of educational practices to include females, although maintaining segregation of the sexes at secondary level and mixed population at the primary and completely at the university levels. These trends in education coupled with "feminization of primary teaching," together with the utilization of the educational system, is to overcome manpower associated with economic development.

ECONOMIC PROSPERITY AND UTILIZATION OF HUMAN RESOURCES IN IRAQI EDUCATION

The advent of oil revenues in past years gave Iraq the opportunity to accelerate the process of educational development in the country. The main purpose of this article is to show is how these revenues affected educational policies and practices, if any, and in turn affected the manpower for the economic development. An evaluation of the degree of success of these policies and practices will also be attempted.

A Historical Glimpse

On the eve of independence in 1934, when Iraq first joined the League of Nations, education concentrated almost exclusively upon primary education and the teaching of the three Rs to the male members of the population. As late as 1958, when Iraq became a republic, the dominance of traditional education in the country remained. Today, the basis of educational policy is:

> Education must focus comprehensively on the building of an educational system in harmony with the principles and aims of the 17th July's Revolution . . . a system that rears generations infused with the ideals of national and socialist democracy and capable of realizing the ambition of the leading party (BASP). . . . Time will not be on the side of the Revolution if we maintain the pace in education of the last ten years.[1]

Since its independence from Turkish rule after the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire post-World War I, Iraq had been operating with a system of centralized state functions including the educational, political, and economic fields. The subsequent Iraqi

governments devoted increasing attention to their responsibilities in providing not only general education, but also higher and specialized education. Although radical changes occurred in government forms and political attitudes following the Iraqi Revolution of July 14, 1958 (when the system changed from Monarchical to Republican), the concept of centralized government control of the nation's affairs continued to prevail as a necessity for the state to protect public interest and individual rights and to achieve national unity.

Recent Past

There have been a number of fundamental developments, particularly in the last two decades. These have been the widening of education to include every child reaching the age of six. This task was accomplished by the Compulsory Primary Education Act of 1974, which was implemented in 1978 and achieved its goal in 1983-84 when 27 million enrolled. The other step was the launching of the national campaign against illiteracy for the ages of 15-45 in 1980, when 2.25 million males and females were enrolled in classes across the country. There have also been attempts to widen the educational opportunities to include females. Segregation of the sexes is maintained at the secondary level, is somewhat mixed at the primary level, and is completely mixed at university level. The ultimate aim of this policy, coupled with "feminization of primary teaching" and together with the utilization of the educational system, is to overcome manpower problems associated with the economic development of the country.

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There has been a strong appreciation that education can be used to raise the productivity of the Iraqi labor force and to equip the country with indigenous skilled labor. While recognizing the need for a highly skilled manpower and the benefits that it can bring in terms of raising the standard of living in the country, the development of the educational system in line with the requirements of industry and the economy hindered to some degree by the rural traditionalism. Even so, considerable progress has been made at all levels of education.

The Educational System and Its Development

General education takes place in three states: primary, intermediate and secondary. Boys and girls are taught separately at intermediate and secondary levels, but a new approach of women teachers for certain boys at secondary schools has been launched and named "Tajribia"; i.e., experimental. Primary education begins at the age of six and continues normally for six years in both single sex and mixed schools. The former are more prevalent in rural areas, while the latter are mushrooming in urban localities. Pre-primary education at nursery and kindergartens are flourishing but this age is not a prerequisite for entry to primary education. Students who complete the sixth grade in primary school then proceed to the intermediate level for a further stage lasting three years. Intermediate education follows a wide syllabus, and ends with a public examination (baccalaureate). From 15 years of age, students enter into secondary education, which becomes increasingly specialized. Most enter into a general secondary scheme which covers a wide

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range of subjects in the first year. During the second and third years students specialize in either art- or science-based subjects. (Since 1982, however, there has been a serious attempt to streamline and channel intermediate schools graduates.) Those who achieve less than 65 (or 70 now) percent average in the baccalaureate examinations will be barred from following general secondary education but encouraged to follow vocational-technical education.

At the secondary stage there are more vocational and technical programs available at industrial or agricultural schools; students here are awarded the secondary vocational certificate on completion. Alternatively, students can choose to enter commercial schools at the secondary stage, again for three years, leading to a secondary commercial certificate. An additional option for female secondary students is offered in home economics courses (home arts schools were abolished in 1974-75).

Higher education begins normally at 18 years of age for both male and female students who have gained the secondary certificate and attained certain average grades which vary from year to year, but generally are not less than 60% for science-based and 70% for art-based subjects. Again, a wide range of options exist. Those having a general secondary certificate may find a place in a university or college. Currently, there are six universities, and a seventh university charter has been drafted (The Kufa University). Higher education in a broad range of subjects is available at the Universities of Baghdad, Basrah, Mosul, Salahiddin (Sulimaniya), Almustansiria, Technology, and

the Foundations of Technical Institutes. Degree and non-degree courses are taught at junior colleges for teachers (12 months post-secondary; 36 months post-intermediate); Science and Mathematics Centres for English Language and post-secondary sections of technical and vocational institute (Foundation for Vocational Training).

The Enrollment Picture

If progress can be measured by the expansion of capacity (i.e., in terms of school enrollment, buildings and equipment), then the education and training sectors in Iraq have developed substantially from 1968 to 1984. The number of pre-primary/kindergarten school children increased from 15,553 in 1967-68, to 76,663 in 1983-84, or by 293% (annual increase of 25%). The number of primary school pupils increased from 990,718 in 1967-68, to 2,698,542 in 1983-84, or by 172%, and the total number of students in primary education in 1984-85 is expected to be 3 million (annual increase of 14%). The number of students in the technical/vocational schools increased from slightly over 10,000 to well over 77,000 (with a 60:40 ratio of boys to girls). This rate of growth represents a total increase of 65%, or a 36% annual increase. But this can be set against a plan target of over 140,000 in 1984-85 and a total number for the plan 1980-81 through 1984-85 of 374,927.[2]

The number of students enrolled in higher education, on the other hand, increased from 11,361 in 1968-69 to 31,181 in 1979-80 (of those 7,550 in higher technical education), or a growth of 174% (16% annual growth). This kind of quantitative

expansion in all sectors of education has frequently been met with a disappointing utilization of capacity. Despite the desperate need of the country for an increased Iraqi manpower with technical skills, the use of facilities designed for technical and vocational training has often been below 50% of the student capacity available. Nevertheless, there has been a substantially high rate of growth in student enrollment; the universities have followed suit and expanded enrollments by an average of 16% annually between 1969 and 1980. Primary education has grown by an average of 14% (20% for females alone) in the same period, while the annual growth of intermediate education is 31%.

There were, nevertheless, two disappointing trends found between 1975 and 1980--the number of male students undertaking teacher training has declined, although female enrollments in this sector have more than doubled. The number of enrollees increased from slightly over 15,000 to well over 36,000, 200%, and an average of 9% annually. This increase was particularly significant for females whose number increased 252%, with an annual rate of growth of 16.5%.[3]

There are several possible explanations for the reduction in male students attending teacher training, not the least of which is the low remuneration combined with relative low prestige and an increased cost of living in this period. Perhaps more importantly, the primary teacher training institutions had special preference for females (for quick earning careers) combined with a relatively demanding job; in addition to the encour-

agement of the authorities. The other recent trend is the increase of female enrollment in vocational-technical education. The enrollment in 1983-84 was 1,626 in agricultural; 2,498 in industrial; and 18,625 in commercial institutes. Perhaps the reasons for such increases are the change in social attitude toward non-academic education and the low standards required for admission.

Major Problems in the Education Sector

The common feature of all types of education in Iraq is a tremendous growth in educational facilities and opportunities combined with an imbalance of the academic versus vocational/ technical education, and the relative reluctance on the part of the students (especially males) to take full advantage of what is vocationally available to them. Growth, it must be added, has often been associated with quantitative and not qualitative improvement in staffing and course offerings.

A general secondary education with literary (art) bias is still the most preferred, especially for females, while technical education remains undersubscribed. This is also true of higher education. There have been no significant changes in the proportion of students taking the more career-related degree courses at universities. This can be judged from the number of students graduates from universities colleges, and technical institutes which increased from 6,323 in 1968-69 to 21,404 in 1979-80 and the total number of graduates (B.S./B.A. or Diploma) during that period was 115,204 distributed among disciplines as follows:

7,712	Medical Sciences: Medicine, Dentistry, Pharmacy
17,270	Engineering and Technology
14,350	Basic Sciences
9,123	Agricultural and Veterinary Studies
20,085	Administration and Economics
34,661	Humanities and Social Sciences
8,309	Education Colleges
2,070	Physical Education/Sport Sciences
1,624	Academy of Fine Arts Graduates

The figures show, however, an increased proportion of total enrollments but disguises a large proportion (nearly 50%) of students taking degree courses leading to white collar jobs (Administration/Economics/Social Sciences). The growth of general secondary education enrollments must also place increased burdens upon university placement in literary-based non-vocational courses.

The Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research, now in charge of university education, planned to admit 108,000 students during the years 1981-1985. Students were enrolled as follows: 20,455 in the academic years 1981-82; 21,705 in 1982-83; 22,725 in 1983-84; and 23,230 in 1984-85, providing that the number of students allocated annually to Schools of Agriculture must not exceed 1,000. Also, against a set target of 91,406 male and female graduates distributed as: 17,159 in 1981-82; 20,447 in 1982-83; 19,768 in 1983-84; and 19,589 in 1984-85.

Education is now free and compulsory in the country and the current policy is hoped to provide equal access to basic education to all citizens. The second plan (1980 to 1984) hoped that an enrollment of all six-year-old boys and girls could be achieved by 1984. While this was made possible, there are

regional differences in the proportion of children in full-time education. This is particularly so in relation to female education especially in remote rural areas/villages where it is essential for schools (occasionally one-teacher schools in such areas) to be located within reachable distance in order to attract enrollment and guarantee attendance.

As might be expected from an economy with a financial strength, pressures are placed upon resources other than capital, particularly human resources. Coping with such massive expansion of students clearly puts pressure on the educational sector and its staff, e.g., increased student ratio and having two (16%) or three (5%) school shifts occupying the same building. Of the 9,477 primary schools in 1979-80, 25% of them were unsuitable.[4]

Another consequential stress was the need to recruit non-Iraqi teachers, especially in higher education. By 1980, over two-thirds of the teaching staff in universities were Iraqis and the rest were Arab expatriates (mainly Egyptians) and foreigners. The ratio varies from one university to another; for example, in Baghdad University, the Iraqi teaching staff in 1980 was 92%, while in Salahiddin (then Sulimaniya) was 59%. The teacher to student ratio also varied. In Baghdad University it was 1 to 18; 1 to 16 in Mosul; 1 to 20 in Basrah; 1 to 13 in Salahiddin; 1 to 29 in Al-Mustansiria; 1 to 41 in the University of Technology during the 1979-80 academic year. The ratio also varied according to specialization. It was 1 to 12 in the Medical subjects; 1 to 29 in engineering and technology; 1 to 9 in

veterinary and agriculture; 1 to 11 in basic sciences; 1 to 43 in administration and economics; and 1 to 20 for humanities and social sciences.

Clearly, this is not a situation which the Iraqi government would wish to continue indefinitely. Teachers on short-term contracts of one or two years duration do not represent the best means of achieving a reliable and efficient educational system, but they are better than no teachers at all. Indeed, this highlights a fundamental problem in the secondary education field where large numbers of graduates have nowhere to go but to enroll in a course (any course) in a university. The growth of the education sector has put increasing strain upon its administration and management. The political reports of the 8th and 9th conferences of BASP (1974-82) recognized the difficulty. This has shown itself in the inability to adequately plan and monitor the effectiveness and cost of education and to develop adequate facilities fairly distributed on a regional basis. In higher education, for example, the dropout rate is high, as is the average time period necessary to generate graduates. One cause of this high rate has been the lack of career counseling for students. The unavoidable and slow growth of the administrative structure in higher education is another obstacle. The Ministry of Higher Education, for example, was only founded in 1970 and has not yet fully clarified its responsibilities and powers. The Ministry has been tentative in its actions in

attempting to bring about a more coordinated approach to university expansion for fear of severly jeopardizing the more or less independent nature of each university.

As with other sectors of the economy, there is a dearth of qualified manpower able to administer and manage the educational and training system in the country; efforts are piecemeal, whereas the requirement is for an integrated, coherent, and continuously monitored system with the resources available to divert students into those subject areas consistent with the skilled manpower needs of the economy.

These deficiencies in the system have, to some extent, been identified by the government. Unfortunately many of the initiatives and suggestions contained in the proceedings of the Educational Debate have not yet been implemented. This is not to deny that major strides have been made, the most significant of which is the general concensus on the role of women's education in the country. The percentage of women in this sector is high (46% in 1980 and 1981 in primary education; 37.2% in higher education) and the percentage of working women rose to 18% of the total labor force in the country--a respectable level in comparison with the women in other developing countries.

Footnotes

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   Ministry of Planning (1980). Annual Abstracts of Statistics, (Republic of Iraq).

3. Alef-Ba Weekly (1984), No. 836, p. 27.

4. Ministry of Education (1980). A blueprint for education and higher education sector in Iraq. Submitted for the Educational Debate, July, 1981.